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AUTHOR Zemsky, Robert, Ed.
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ABSTRACT

This issue of "Policy Perspectives" explores the obligation of institutions of higher education to prepare students for lives of citizenship in addition to individual success. The truth is that colleges and universities have never actually done much to educate students for lives of civic and political engagement. The real issue is what they must do to be part of the solution. Four fundamental activities are: (1) convene broad-ranging institutional discussions of the meaning and importance of civic engagement in a democratic society; (2) develop curricular programs that impact an understanding of principles central to an inclusive, diverse democracy; (3) demonstrate a willingness to magnify those voices expressing views that might not be heard otherwise; and (4) model responsible citizenship through the institution's own processes of academic governance and engagement with its neighbors. Fostering a more active sense of civic and political participation results from a combination of external motivation and an institution's recognition of the benefits such steps could yield for its own purposes. (SLD)

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PERSPECTIVES

The Knight Higher Education Collaborative
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DINNER IS WITH ALUMNI BIG DONORS. BREAKFAST IS WITH A SIX-FIGURE GIVER. AT TEN YOU MEET DR. LEXUS ABOUT HIS SCIENCE CENTER GIFT AND NOON IS YOUR ROUSING TALK TO STUDENTS ON MONEY CORRUPTING POLITICS.

Disputed Territories

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RESIDENT

Disputed Territories

Among enlightened company, nothing brings nods of assent quite like the notion that college graduates should be prepared to lead lives of civic engagement. It is a sentiment—this call for students ready and able to take up lives of informed citizenship—that figures prominently in the mission of virtually every institution of higher education. Its affirmation is so natural as to be instinctive—and yet it is one in which affirmative nods too often become preludes to simply nodding off.

Today, too many of the nation's colleges and universities simply proclaim the importance of civic engagement. Too few do much more than publish lists documenting their students' volunteer activities as evidence of a broader institutional investment in the public well-being. Only a handful can be said to practice models of civic engagement in which the interests of community and academy are purposefully entwined.

As long as colleges and universities can fulfill their obligation to educate students for citizenship primarily through anecdote and symbolism, nodding off may in fact be the most natural response. When the opposite is true—when an institution begins to take seriously its commitment to civic engagement by changing its curriculum and approaches to learning, its criteria for awarding tenure, or its capital campaign goals—every eye pops open, every head hunkers down in anticipation of protracted debate.

It is a debate worth having, if for no other reason than America itself has changed: its citizens have become more mobile, its communities more diverse, its arguments more fractious. Changed as well are how people behave toward one another, how they communicate, what they think governments can do, and what roles they believe markets can play. Through it all there is simply less civic participation, less of a sense of common identity, less commitment to a collective vision that is centered in civic or political purposes or in the responsibilities that attend the conveying of citizenship.

It is also a debate worth having because American colleges and universities have both the capacity and the obligation to educate a citizenry that takes a strong, active part in the nation's civic and political affairs. Through the issues they promote or eschew, colleges and universities help create the conditions that encourage as well as discourage the kind of informed participation on which civic engagement depends. What is required—what will give the issue of civic engagement the kind of traction it has perhaps never had—is a commitment to make questions of public pursuits central to the campus agenda. Making the issue real means making civic engagement an integral part of a campus's own governance. It means building partnerships that extend beyond the campus community narrowly defined. It means acting on the principle that fostering a more engaged citizenry ultimately serves higher education's own purposes as well as those of society in general.

Our Civic Purposes Roundtable, convened jointly by the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education and the Knight Higher Education Collaborative, was in many ways a rehearsal for the

kind of discourse we have in mind. Our goal was to state as clearly as possible how the nation's colleges and universities might contribute to a greater sense of collective purpose and commitment within the American polity. What kinds of actions could make the cultivation of civic purposes more central, not just to the agenda of colleges and universities but to the goals and accomplishments of the students who attend them? What strategies could register the value of civic engagement in sharper relief for a population of learning consumers who, like much of contemporary society, are more concerned with personal rather than societal returns on the time and effort they expend?

This issue of *Policy Perspectives* itself should attest that answering these questions is no simple matter. Nearly every attempt to define common ground is likely to confront issues that are deep and pervasive, in which there are few answers that satisfy everyone and many that please no one. In our own passage through these disputed territories we came to understand more clearly just how important as well as difficult it is to sustain a dialogue focusing on the academy's obligations to prepare students for lives of citizenship in addition to individual success. At the same time, we came away from those encounters with a renewed sense of purpose, energized both by what is possible and by the unacceptability of just leaving matters be. This was one sleeping dog we resolved not to let lie.

Downward Slopes

A wide variety of indicators corroborate the intuitive sense that civic engagement in American society has substantially declined. One touchstone is Robert Putnam's *Bowling Alone*, which traces the decline of activities and organizations that brought earlier generations of Americans into broader spheres of social and civic participation. In chart after chart, the pattern of diminishing participation appears for community organizations that grew steadily from the early decades of the twentieth century, peaked in the 1960s or 1970s, and have since fallen off appreciably.

Interest and participation in political affairs have followed the same downward slope. Surveys of college students and of recent college graduates suggest a generation of young people who would neither a participant nor a joiner be. The annual freshman surveys administered by Alexander Astin's Higher Education Research Institute at UCLA show that today's entering students express a general distrust of politics. Although certain issues such as the use of sweatshops to manufacture college- or university-branded apparel may galvanize their attention, entering students by and large do not see politics or the pursuit of public initiatives as playing a major role in their lives. While a majority of recent graduates responding to the Collegiate Results Instrument, developed by the National Center for Postsecondary Improvement, self-reported voting in the 1996 presidential election, only about one in three reported performing volunteer work, and only one in 20 said they had worked in a political campaign.

Apart from this decline in individual participation, there is the more general disappearance of common ground in the American political arena—a matter, it is said, of having too much *pluribus* and not enough *unum*. Many regions and cities today contain such an extensive range of populations and concerns that it becomes all but impossible for that community to speak in a collective voice. Instead, single-issue organizations and leaders abound, without much empathy for other constituencies and too often indifferent to issues other than their own. The politics of wedge issues has replaced the art of compromise and consensus in the nation's societal values.

The difficulty of convening and sustaining institutional discussions of civic engagement cannot be an excuse for shirking responsibility to get the process started.

Major businesses, no longer so local, have visibly loosened the ties that once linked them to the communities of which they were a part. Today, corporate philanthropy has become more *quid pro quo* than ever; giving back to the community is an action more often taken in pursuit of economic objectives than out of any sense of partnership or shared destiny. In the boardrooms of corporations that have outsourced labor and downsized local operations to maximize shareholder value, the prevailing voices are those arguing that the community is no longer among the corporation's principal stakeholders.

To what extent have higher education institutions fueled this trend toward the increasing fragmentation in social and political life? The most generous accounting would render colleges and universities harmless though not necessarily blameless. However great the urge to idealize the past, the truth is that higher education may never have been particularly good at educating students for lives of civic and political engagement. If college graduates of the 1940s and 1950s exhibited greater involvement in civic and political affairs, the cause likely had less to do with their college experiences and more with the nation's political climate during and after the Second World War. The sense of common purpose and engagement some college students then exhibited may have been a function of the elite, even exclusionary profile of higher education in the 1950s and 1960s—a kind of educational noblesse oblige that colored much of that generation's political commitment. Regardless of the motivation for student involvement, the most important question is not whether colleges and universities have added to the problem but what they must do to be a part of the solution.

Elements of Engagement

Education remains the best predictor of civic involvement, and higher education serves as the nation's most important common ground. Indeed, their very diversity makes it critical for colleges and universities to provide their students with a real basis for participating in the civic life of society. To do so, however, a working definition of civic engagement is required. What are the attributes and behaviors the nation should expect its college graduates to exemplify?

The practice of volunteerism is certainly a good start. Individuals ought to invest their own social capital in the betterment of society, giving time and effort to others for shared community purposes. The willingness to work with others for a cause extending beyond the realm of family, friends, school, or workplace often becomes the foundation for engagement in the broader domain of civic and political affairs. In allotting time and effort to broader societal issues, a person is likely to develop the insights and empathies that are important for functioning as an active member of an inclusive democracy.

Yet volunteerism is only a first step in the kind of engagement we envision. Beyond the giving of one's time to service or political causes, participation in civic engagement requires adherence to a set of principles for human conduct. Among that set of attributes one would expect to find a commitment to moral integrity, fairness, and a willingness to be accountable for one's actions. Beyond that, the process of civic engagement in a democratic society requires a disposition to:

The curricular objective should not be to produce a citizenry with identical preferences and prejudices. Rather, the objective should be to ensure that college graduates have thought about those questions and formulated responsible answers to which they are prepared to give public voice.

- Treat others with dignity;
- Listen and compromise;
- Argue on the basis of factual evidence;
- Abide by the outcomes achieved through agreed-upon processes of political debate and deliberation; and
- Publicly affirm the validity of that process even when the decision reached runs counter to one's own preferences.

However simple they are to state, these rules are more often proclaimed than obeyed on many college campuses and in most political arenas. What would make such rules work? That answer is equally simple: a passionate commitment to democracy itself, and, in particular, to an inclusive diversity in which most citizens remain committed to shared purposes.

Sparking the Commitment

We believe colleges and universities have a special responsibility to educate citizens who are ready, willing, and able to discharge the obligations of membership in our democratic society. But within that broad consensus also lie the roots of conflict and uncertainty

within any college or university—what our own roundtable came to see as disputed territory. The question with which we wrestled was simple enough: What kinds of learning experiences and practices might best promote an active commitment to civic and political engagement among the nation's citizens in general, and its college graduates in particular? Our own deliberations centered around four fundamental activities that colleges and universities might undertake:

1. Convene broad-ranging institutional discussions of the meaning and importance of civic engagement in a democratic society.

The logical first step is to convene broad-based institutional dialogues concerning the values that are central to a culture of civic engagement. What colleges and universities need to demonstrate, through both precept and practice, is that the process works, that inclusion is a means as well as an end, and that the basis of a civic polity is shared values as well as shared responsibilities and tasks.

Productive discussions of human and societal values are never easy to convene—or to conclude. To discuss what citizens share in common is to become immersed in controversy. And yet, without those discussions and the confusion and pain they often entail, little beyond individual initiative is likely. It is the discussion of core values and civic responsibilities that identifies the shared principles undergirding a democratic society; it is also the activity most likely to bring individual differences into sharpest form. But the difficulty of convening and sustaining such discussions cannot be an excuse for shirking the responsibility to get the process started.

2. Develop curricular programs that actively impart an understanding of principles central to an inclusive, diverse democracy.

Whether the discussions of civic values and perspectives prove productive will likely depend on how well the institution integrates those discussions within its larger curricular framework. Colleges and universities have a responsibility to help their students understand the importance of values in their personal lives and in the workings of society. Ultimately, students—as students—need to define the values that will guide their choices as both individuals and as citizens. The curricular objective should not be to produce a citizenry with identical preferences and prejudices. Rather, the objective should be to ensure that college graduates have thought about those questions and formulated responsible answers to which they are prepared to give public voice.

The irony, of course, is that discussions of common curricular options have proved to be among the most difficult conversations in which a campus can engage productively—demonstrating anew that true civic engagement begins on the home front. Nonetheless, we believe that every institution has a responsibility to provide students with a foundation in the principles of democratic government extending beyond what they gained from their families and K-12 schooling. In part, conveying this understanding implies using the liberal arts as a platform for learning the lessons of history and including a kind of tough-minded political science that focuses on the meaning and evolution of the nation's political and constitutional traditions.

There are times when a minority view provides an important corrective to a decision reached through majority rule. In such instances, a college or university must be prepared to create a space for voices that would otherwise exert little impact on a particular policy or course of action.

We do not advocate a specific set of interventions. The curricular and co-curricular experiences an institution designs for its students must necessarily be a function of its own identity and circumstances. We would expect that an institution committed to making civic engagement an integral part of its curriculum would want to explore a wide variety of pedagogies, including strategies that promote active learning through community service. Pedagogies of engagement, which place students in environments that stress active learning, can and should have a major impact on student learning and their proclivity toward civic involvement. Institutions need to design guided problem-solving activities through which students can address issues and formulate solutions that are both consistent with their personal values and

informed by their understanding of collective societal values.

3. Demonstrate a willingness to magnify those voices expressing views that could otherwise fail to be heard.

One of the most complex issues facing any democratic institution is the creation of a forum that is open and receptive to every voice in a debate, including those whose views are not of the majority. The history of American democracy—and of higher education governance as an extension of that tradition—is rife with examples of the necessity of magnifying minority voices that would otherwise be drowned out in the tide of majority opinion. There are times when a minority view provides an important corrective to a decision reached through majority rule. In such instances, a college or university must be prepared to create a space for voices that would otherwise exert little impact on a particular policy or course of action. Beyond this measure, the administrative leadership of an institution must be prepared to stake the institution's credibility in support of often divisive issues, even if the position it upholds differs from the views of the majority of its faculty and staff. Colleges and universities must ask themselves: Is the tradition of open and inclusive debate sufficient to ensure a political domain that affords equal consideration of all viewpoints?

The culture of any given institution will determine the extent to which it must proactively work to provide a space for minority opinions to be heard in its internal and civic deliberations. In this, as in other disputed territories, an institution cannot choose to ignore the issues simply because they are too uncomfortable to confront. Failure to address and debate issues of such fundamental importance will erode the foundations of civic life in the institution itself.

4. Model responsible citizenship through the institution's own processes of academic governance as well as through engagement with its immediate neighbors.

Beyond the dialogues they convene and the values and skills they impart through the curriculum and other learning experiences, colleges and universities must actively exemplify their commitment to promoting civic engagement. Institutions willing to act publicly on the values they define will send a strong signal—to their students, their extended communities, and themselves—that those values are more than stylish rhetoric. One of the ways an institution demonstrates its commitment to responsible citizenship is the manner in which it conducts its own affairs of governance. A tradition of academic decision-making that encourages active, open debate on issues facing the institution will help underscore the strength of the democratic process and its potential for helping an institution align its values with the choices it makes.

No less important than ensuring the vitality and effectiveness of their own governance systems are the actions institutions take as citizens of an extended region. By involving themselves with their neighbors, colleges and universities model the kind of behavior they ultimately expect of their students. Becoming engaged in the workings of a community will mean different things to different institutions; even institutions of similar size and mission will find that civic engagement derives from particular rhythms and purposes relevant both to themselves and their local communities. Often the key to effective partnerships is the realization by an institution and its stakeholders that their destinies are intrinsically bound to one another. When an institution achieves this perspective, engagement in community and civic life becomes something more than perfunctory obligation. The ties developed with society at large help to realize a vision of the institution as a genuine partner in creating a future of shared purposes.

One of the ways an institution demonstrates its commitment to responsible citizenship is the manner in which it conducts its own affairs of governance.

Even as they move toward greater involvement in the workings of a local and extended polity, colleges and universities face tough choices. Should community involvement become a more pronounced institutional priority, equal to that of teaching and research? Again, it is a question that must be confronted directly and explicitly. Every institution must create the forums that allow this discussion to proceed, while ensuring that those who express opinions can do so without fear of personal reprisal. The outcomes of such debates then become the touchstones on which curricular and other choices are made.

Levers of Cultural Change

On most campuses the instilling of a more active commitment to civic engagement will require nothing short of a change in culture that includes, if nothing else, a broadened definition of institutional goals and measures of success. Rare indeed is the organization that can implement a change agenda without making certain that those who assume the challenge receive tangible rewards in addition to the intrinsic satisfaction of doing good.

The first step is to ask: Why is it that so few of our own faculty and staff make service to both community and institution a personal priority? The answer can be found by acknowledging just how few rewards currently accrue to those who would take on the challenge of promoting civic engagement. While some exemplary educators engage in community service and seek to promote civic commitment in their students, in the broader scheme of things educating for civic involvement is not an activity that is likely to sustain bottom-up momentum. Leadership from the top is also required, along with the commitment of financial resources to support the value of educating for citizenship. It is inherently a presidential, provostial, decanal agenda—and ultimately one that requires the active participation of trustees as well. A lesson learned by many aspiring presidents makes the point: However prominent a role civic engagement might have played in discussions preceding their appointment, once on the job they find themselves evaluated by criteria having more to do with fundraising and capital construction than with promoting their community's social or civic well-being.

Educating for civic involvement is not an activity that is likely to sustain bottom-up momentum. Leadership from the top is also required, along with the commitment of financial resources to support the value of educating for citizenship.

The concept of educating for citizenship can be a hard sell, because it is often seen as an objective that conflicts with the attainment of academic excellence. Colleges and universities seeking more selective and competitive undergraduate admissions will direct energy and resources to that end, even at the expense of other laudable goals. Many years ago, one institution found itself having to choose between working to establish a Phi Beta Kappa chapter or pursuing a set of initiatives designed to provide students with expanded opportunities for community and civic participation. Not surprisingly, the institution's first priority became the meeting of standards established for affiliation with Phi Beta Kappa. Only after succeeding in this goal could it "afford the luxury" of providing greater opportunities for students to discover the responsibilities of citizenship. In general, we worry that most institutions will see civic engagement as a worthwhile but prickly goal to be pursued only after the fulfillment of other, more academic objectives.

Our colleagues, Anne Colby and Tom Ehrlich, senior scholars at the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, are studying the impact of higher education on civic responsibility and working with several institutions to enhance that impact. They have found that a number of colleges and universities in every category—from community college to research university—have made broad institutional commitments to the civic development of their students. They are documenting the work of the following campuses as exemplars of comprehensive and intentional approaches to civic learning: Alverno College, College of St. Catherine, California State University at Monterey Bay, Emory University, Kapi'olani Community College, Messiah College, University of Notre Dame, Portland State University, Spelman College, Turtle Mountain Community College, Tusculum College, and the United States Air Force Academy.

All of these campuses share several important institutional features. First, their public statements of institutional purpose stress the importance of personal integrity, social responsibility, and civic and political engagement and leadership. Second, the upper levels of the administration in both academic and student affairs endorse the importance of these educational goals and allocate resources to programs designed to promote them. Third, multiple and overlapping approaches are used in each setting, and there are mechanisms in place to facilitate communication among the different programs on campus in order to strengthen the coherence of the student experience.

An equally important factor may be an institution's awareness that its future well-being is inextrica-

bly tied to that of its local community. The recognition of this linkage recently prompted four institutions—Franklin & Marshall College; Michigan State University; State University of New York, College at Geneseo; and Washington and Jefferson College—to work together in conjunction with the Knight Collaborative to explore principles and strategies of institutional engagement with a community. While none of these four would consider itself at present to be a national leader in the realm of community engagement, each has placed the issue squarely on its agenda in ways that it had not done before (see *Exemplars*, accompanying this issue of *Policy Perspectives*).

In the final analysis, an institution will make civic engagement one of its first priorities if—and only if—it perceives that engagement to be in its own interests. During the time when one of the nation's major universities confronted the decision of changing from a single-sex to a coeducational institution, the then-president pursued a strategy of entertaining, even encouraging, a broad array of reasons for the change, rather than confining the rationale to a narrow set of issues. It was a strategy of "giving people lots of hooks on which to hang their hats" concerning an issue that would have a major impact on the character and future of the institution. The same kind of strategy is required to lend an issue such as civic engagement greater importance in an institution's agenda.

With this strategy, as with nearly every major question confronting an institution, there are hooks to accommodate many different hats. Some may believe that a heightened emphasis on service and citizenship will improve an institution's market position in the competition for undergraduate enrollment. Others, concerned that their college or university is located in a community that has suffered economic decline, may seek to establish institutional partnerships with local political and business leaders to enhance the quality of life in the region. Still others may act to develop their institution's curricular and co-curricular programs, prompted by the conviction that civic engagement is enhanced through the experiences in real-life situations that service- and community-based learning afford.

Public policy also has an important role to play in making civic purposes figure more plainly in the self-interests of colleges and universities. A policy of loan forgiveness to students who enter lower-paying service professions, for example, could have an impact on the number of students willing to pursue such courses of study in their college years. If colleges and universities in turn came to recognize that a growing share of their students were seeking significant involvement in civic purposes as part of their undergraduate educations, these institutions could adjust their curricular and co-curricular programs accordingly.

Accreditation agencies can play similarly important roles in shaping the priorities of universities and colleges. More than any other factor, periodic regional accreditation has been responsible for promoting the widespread adoption of learning assessment in higher education institutions over the past decade. If these accrediting agencies were to accord the same importance to service and civic learning in their evaluation criteria, the learning programs of colleges and universities would come to reflect this element as well.

If accrediting agencies were to accord central importance to service and civic learning in their evaluation criteria, the learning programs of colleges and universities would come to reflect this element as well.

In each of these cases, fostering a more active sense of civic and political participation results from a combination of external motivation and an institution's recognition of the benefits such steps could yield for its own purposes.

The Long Run

Emerson observed that every age must write its own books. Each generation of Americans must define in its own terms the meaning of the democratic system of government it inherits. Members of today's leadership generation who came of age from the late 1950s through the early 1970s often express difficulty relating to subsequent generations, whose formative experience and political orientation differ markedly from their own. Among today's collegiate leaders there is an important and surprisingly large cohort of baby boomers who find themselves confronting versions of the same social and political issues that

engaged them so passionately as young adults. Having run the race on behalf of these causes over three and four decades, many find it distressing to witness a generation of young people who appear to be so noncommittal in the course of persistent societal problems, so casual at the prospect of taking up the baton as agents of social and political change.

The reasons why young people today so often shy away from political and civic participation are not difficult to enumerate. The absence of a central, defining national issue—such as the Civil Rights Movement or a just or an unjust war—may contribute to the sense of complacence in political affairs not just among the young but across the whole of contemporary society. The increasing commercialization of culture and education, spurred by the growth of media and technology, may have contributed to the sense that learning consists simply of gaining a credential, and freedom of choice means selecting among name brands. The comparative slowness of political deliberation in a democratic system may not accord with a culture increasingly accustomed to satisfying desires at the click of a mouse. Finally, in the aftermath of Vietnam and Watergate, large numbers of young people have simply internalized the conviction, vocalized by many of their parents, that all forms of government and social authority are inherently suspicious if not outright corrupt.

In many ways the essential challenge confronting today's societal leadership—and higher education faculty and administrators in particular—is to transfer the responsibility for a strong democratic society to a generation that views societal issues with different eyes and will confront issues within different contexts than today's leaders might expect. What is required is both skepticism and impatience—that, and the recognition that the pursuit of civic engagement is in fact a marathon that will test the mettle of every college and university. Those who run this course will want to seek out others who can keep the pace, who can inspire and teach as well as console and encourage. The course ahead is one that can only be run with diligence, discipline, and preparation. It's time to get started.

Each generation of Americans must define in its own terms the meaning of the democratic system of government it inherits.

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The essay, "Disputed Territories," is based on the Civic Purposes Roundtable, jointly convened in July 2000 by the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education and the Knight Collaborative. The roundtable sought to identify actions that could make the cultivation of civic purposes more central not just to the agenda of colleges and universities but to the goals and accomplishments of students who attend them. The following individuals were participants in the Civic Purposes Roundtable and helped to shape the essay that appears in this issue of Policy Perspectives:

Walter A. Brown
Assistant Professor of Educational Leadership
The George Washington University

Anne Colby
Senior Scholar
Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching

Robert A. Corrigan
President
San Francisco State University

Dolores E. Cross
President
Morris Brown College

Alfredo G. de los Santos Jr.
Research Professor
Arizona State University, Main Campus

Thomas Ehrlich
Senior Scholar
Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching

Juliet V. García
President
The University of Texas at Brownsville

John Immerwahr
Senior Research Fellow
Public Agenda
Associate Vice President for Academic Affairs
Villanova University

Wallace D. Loh
Dean, College of Arts and Science
Seattle University

Arturo Madrid
Murchison Distinguished Professor of the Humanities
Trinity University

Brian C. Mitchell
President
Washington and Jefferson College

David J. Morse
Director of Public Affairs
The Pew Charitable Trusts

Carol Geary Schneider
President
Association of American Colleges and Universities

Peter Schrag
Senior Correspondent
The American Prospect

Lou Anna K. Simon
Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs
Michigan State University

Virginia B. Smith
President Emerita
Vassar College

Isaac Stein
Chair, Board of Trustees
Stanford University

Donald M. Stewart
President and CEO
The Chicago Community Trust

Donald O. Straney
Assistant to the Provost for Faculty Development
Professor of Zoology
Michigan State University

Maureen E. Warren
Vice President for Housing and Community Development
Fannie Mae

Marna C. Whittington
Managing Director
Morgan Stanley Dean Witter Investment Management

Harold M. Williams
President Emeritus
J. Paul Getty Trust

From the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education:

Patrick M. Callan
Joni E. Finney

From the Knight Higher Education Collaborative:

Mary-Linda M. Armacost
Ann J. Duffield
Gregory R. Wegner
Robert Zemsky

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Robert Zemsky
Senior Editor

Ann J. Duffield
Program Director, Knight Collaborative
Senior Consultant, Marts & Lundy, Inc.

Gregory R. Wegner
Managing Editor

James F. Galbally, Jr.
Contributing Editor

Joan S. Girgus
Contributing Editor

William F. Massy
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